

Americans in the Making: Myths of Nation and Immigration in Naturalization Ceremonies in the United States

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Citizenship ceremonies have been practiced for at least a century in the United States. This article explores what citizenship ceremonies – the rituals created to ‘make’ new citizens – can tell us about understandings of citizenship and the nation. Focusing on the case of the US, the paper asks who is being held up as the welcomed citizen and who is excluded in these public events. What does it mean to ‘welcome’ a new citizen and how are migration and national history imagined in these events? These questions become increasingly urgent in the context of securitization and given current debates about the withdrawal of citizenship from suspected ‘extremists’.¹

Introduction

In the middle of a crisis in the Middle East and a political crisis at home, which included the kidnapping of his daughter by terrorists from ‘Qumar’ and a situation of ‘high alert’ over Washington and much of the US, the fictional President Bartlett of *The West Wing* (a US political TV drama) hears that a bomb scare has meant that a group of citizands², mostly from ‘Arab countries’ have had their swearing of the citizenship oath cancelled. In response to this, he asks his aide:

We’re talking folks who have been interviewed and background-checked by two agencies, taken classes to learn our language, passed exams on our history and

1 This article is partly based on work from Bridget Byrne, *Making Citizens: Public Rituals and Personal Journeys to Citizenship* (2014) Palgrave Macmillan.

2 I use the word ‘citizand’ to refer to those who are not yet, but about to become, a new citizen of a country. This is similar to the use of ‘graduand’ to refer to the equivalent liminal status, of about to become a graduate.

government, and been fingerprinted twice; these are the kinds of Arabs we're talking about?³

When his aide replies 'Yes', he is instructed to find an auditorium somewhere to hold the ceremony. At the end of a difficult day, at the end of the episode, he is called to see the ceremony in fact taking place within the White House. He leads the pledge of allegiance and the words of the pledge play over shots of his wife and daughter getting into a limo to leave the White House to go to their country residence, away from the trauma of the kidnapping, the daughter with her head on her mother's lap.

In these short scenes we have the dramatization of the nation-as-family (represented by the actual family of the president) under threat in multiple directions from 'bad' Arabs who must be fought in order to protect the nation-family (Berlant 1997). This is then juxtaposed by the 'good' Arabs, who can be welcomed, given hospitality and brought into the democratic family by their oaths of allegiance and citizenship. The naturalization ceremony is used as a symbol of the idea of inclusion and democracy. In their desire to become citizens, having passed all the state scrutiny, they have proved their worth and earned a welcome. They have answered the 'foreigner question' which Derrida suggests undermines absolute hospitality (Derrida 2000). Their acceptance into the nation-family also serves to prove the integrity and worth of the US state.

This article examines the moment of the making of new citizens – that is the creation of citizens of election rather than birth. It argues that these rituals of naturalization are important because of the insights they can reveal about how citizenship of the nation-state is understood. These public rituals of citizenship can tell us both about who is excluded from this conception of citizenship and what forms of citizenship (and the rights which are attached to them) are valued. In looking at the US naturalization ceremony, I ask: how is the state choosing to represent both itself and migrants? Who is held up as the citizen to be welcomed and embraced by the state and what forms of citizenship are silenced or rejected in this representation? I will also ask: what kind of potential identities and relationships – local, national and more global – are suggested by the ceremonies and what identities are suppressed or explored?

Naturalization ceremonies seek to endow the moment of granting citizenship to migrants with a public – or semi-public – ritual. The creation of a ritual to 'make' citizens also provides an opportunity to assert what citizenship and nationality mean in particular places and particular times. These invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) take place in the context of a range of often heated public debates around immigration and the control of borders. In the context of this growing securitization (Walters 2004), it is crucial to interrogate citizenship ceremonies to ask: who is being held up as the welcomed citizen, and who is excluded in these

3 The episode 'Jefferson Lives' was first broadcast in 2003.

public rituals? What does it mean to ‘welcome’ a new citizen to citizenship and how is migration imagined in these events?

These questions are interesting because the naturalization or citizenship ceremony is not only about the making of citizens (most of whom are of course already citizens of other countries⁴). The ceremony also marks a potentially more complicated border crossing from being simply foreign to being a national – something more than a citizen. National citizenship is often constructed as inevitable and something that has ‘always been there’. This is indeed suggested in the term ‘naturalization’ – to establish something as if native – or natural. But at the same time, the use of the term naturalization for new citizens highlights the idea that the person is not naturally of the state – and perhaps more particularly of the nation. If you have to be ‘naturalized’ how can you be native? Within the term of naturalization, there is the suggestion of impossibility – you may be naturalized, but of course no one can be ‘made’ natural – it suggests artifice and ‘unnaturalness’. This raises the question of whether the naturalized citizen will ever be really seen as equal to, to properly belong, like the (real) national. The possibility, under certain conditions, of the revocation of naturalization also points to its potential non-permanence and a less-than-full-citizenship (Anderson 2008) as does the suspicion faced by certain forms of dual citizenship (Stasiulis and Ross 2006). Thus, these ceremonies need to be understood in their contemporary context of a public discourse which signals a retreat from multiculturalism and continuing debates about immigration and national security. These emphasize loyalty to nation and integration into national culture. This has also shaped responses to migration and a reconfiguration of immigration and citizenship regimes.

In the next section, I will consider the changing conceptualizations of citizenship within scholarly literature and the role of naturalization in these shifting understandings. The following section will discuss the methodology of the research before addressing the specific character of US naturalization ceremonies. The third section will examine the ways in which the US is represented in the ceremonies as a ‘nation of immigrants’ and how cultural and national diversity is represented. Finally, the article will also consider the rhetoric behind the oath of allegiance, and tensions around the possibility of new citizens’ oath-taking not being sincere.

Who Is the Citizen?

Classic Marshallian (Marshall 1950) approaches to citizenship have been criticised for being too focused on stasis and therefore inadequate for dealing with the deterritorialised rights and identities of a more mobile society (Castles and Davidson 2000; Urry 2000). Increased transnational movement raises questions about the importance of citizenship. Many rights that are associated with citizenship are being

4 Some may be stateless or refugees.

extended to resident immigrants without citizenship, particularly under the influence of international human rights discourse (Soysal 1995). Thus Seyla Benhabib argues that we are facing a 'disaggregation of citizenships' where the formerly related dimensions of citizenship (collective identity, privileges of political membership and entitlement to social rights and benefits) are being 'unbundled', at least for those who have European membership (Benhabib 2008: 45). However, in the light of debates around immigration, border control and sovereignty which featured in both the recent referendum in the UK and the presidential campaign in the US, these perhaps optimistic reflections on resident rights need to be reconsidered.

Whilst there are many different forms of citizenship; ways of understanding citizenship and making citizenship claims, it is clear that nation-state citizenship is critical in determining where people can live, work, create families and travel to. Despite claims to the contrary, citizenship is never neutral. In the context of Western countries, notions of citizenship have emerged out of a racialised, classed and gendered history of colonialism and post-colonialism which has shaped both nation and migration (McClintock 1995; Isin 2012; Byrne 2014). The formation of the nation-state system and the technological developments that enabled the state's control of movement over state borders emerged within the colonial context. Benedict Anderson (Anderson 1991) has argued that the development of the idea of the nation was dependent on the technological development of the printing press. With the development of a 'national' literature and news, it was possible to create a sense of the 'we' in the imagined community – people with whom you had a sense of connection and belonging even though you would never meet. In a less well-cited article, Anderson (Anderson 1994) also argues that the national was born of mobility and, in particular, exile produced through industrialisation and imperialism. As people moved away from familiar homes to be educated, to labour in industry, and to colonise or be remade as colonial subjects, then the imagined 'home' of the national narration attained meaning. The nation was recognised and created from looking back at it from a distance. The development of the technological means for spreading these narratives was critical to this process of formalising membership, as were the nation-state's gradual control of birth registration and of movement across its borders (Torpey 2000). These technologies of citizenship enabled new forms of government.

For Foucault, the relationship of race to the state is tied into the development of regulatory power in the form of biopolitics. The state constructs race and difference so as to justify its surveillance and management of the population in defence of the national race which is, by definition, threatened by external, Othered races (Foucault 2003). This notion of race and racial superiority could readily be used to justify colonialism. It was also highly gendered. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the rights attached to citizens have not been evenly available to women, to sexual minorities, to the working class and to colonized and racialised others. There has been considerable research on the gendered, sexualised and racialised nature of citizenship, pointing out the ways which women, sexual minorities and

racialised groups have less secure claims to the rights that citizenship supposedly endows (Barton 1993; Paul 1997; Donovan, Heaphy et al. 1999; Lewis 2004; De Genova 2007; Lister 2007; Lister 2008). For some women (and some racialized or socially disempowered groups), before striving to be recognized as citizens, they struggle to be recognized as human beings of equal worth and dignity to others: what Arendt calls ‘the right to have rights’ (Arendt 1958: 177). In fact, citizenship – how it is understood, who is said to possess it – has often emerged out of a process of differentiating between citizens and those gendered, raced and classed others who could never be citizens – the anti-citizens (Barbero 2012). The construction of the anti-citizen – for example in the figure of the illegal migrant; the terrorist, the uncivilized other, the deviant – can tell us much about the contours of citizenship. It can also act as a warning to citizens about how they should behave. Yet Engin Isin, encourages us to think of ‘citizens without frontiers’ – and to consider the acting (rather than moving) subject (Isin 2012). What Isin calls ‘citizenship acts’ are able to cross the borders of citizenship by subjects *acting as* citizens, even where the state may not recognise them as such (Isin and Nielsen 2008). This is a form of citizenship which rejects – or in Isin’s terms ‘transverses’ – state borders and state definitions. Acts of citizenship frequently involve the voicing of rights and claims which go beyond the national frame (such as the anti-apartheid movement or the activities of Greenpeace or WikiLeaks). They also involve contesting both borders and normative frames. For Isin, ‘a fundamental feature of citizenship act is that it exercises either a right that does not exist or a right that does exist but which is enacted by a political subject who does not exist in the eyes of the law’ (Isin 2012:13).

However, rather than citizenship acts or the anti-citizens, this article is engaged with the question of ‘new’ and formalised citizenship. This is the state citizenship produced by the transnational movements and settlements of people. It involves the granting of citizenship of a nation to people who do not have it by virtue of where they were born or the citizenship status of their parents. These new citizens are not born to the citizenship which they now acquire, they have moved towards it. They have travelled both geographically from one national space to another and proceeded through a range of bureaucratic processes. Obtaining new citizenship is often shaped by a desire to stay, as it gives the right of residence. But it is also often accompanied by the desire to move – to be able to move across national borders with more ease and with the assurance that you can return (Byrne 2014). New citizens, how they come to be citizens, what conditions they have to fulfil to acquire citizenship and how they are received by the state and society of their new nations can tell us much about citizenship itself. Before considering the naturalization ceremonies in the US, the following section will give a brief account of the methodology of the research.

Researching Citizenship Ceremonies

The research behind this article arose out of a larger project comparing citizenship ceremonies in six different countries.⁵ The material in this article is based on the observation of three ceremonies in the United States, two of which (in Manhattan and Brooklyn) were conducted by the author and one (in Oakland, California) by researcher Bethan Harries. Detailed notes were taken during the observations as well as some photographs of the building and decoration etc. Officials who were involved in organizing the ceremonies were also interviewed.

Inevitably, these observations can only tell us about the conduct of those ceremonies in those places on that particular day. Nonetheless, there is sufficient uniformity in the way the ceremonies were conducted, as was confirmed by the officials, that we can take them as generally representative. In fact, in many ways, this limited survey demonstrates that, even internationally, citizenship ceremonies tend to follow a fairly uniform pattern (Byrne 2012; Byrne 2014). They generally take place in similar kinds of public buildings displaying familiar national symbols – flags and heads of state – with comparable officials and dignitaries presiding over them. In terms of the format of the event, all of the ceremonies focus centrally on the taking of an oath or pledge of allegiance and the distribution of certificates of citizenship. And all finish with the playing and singing of the national anthem. Thus there is an internationally recognised lexicon of citizenship ceremonies and often what is most interesting are the incidental remarks and practices which are wrapped around the more expected elements. Yet at the same time, the narration of nation in these events is varied, depending on the atmospheres created, the references made to national myths history and present and future possibilities nation. It is the US narrations which are of interest in this article and the following sections will explore how the history of immigration to the US is represented in the ceremonies as well as tensions in the relationship that is suggested between new citizens and their ‘former’ countries and the uncertainties which can be suggested about the sincerity of oath-taking.

Naturalization Ceremonies in the US

In the impressive, highly decorative and heavily gilded art deco Paramount Theatre in Oakland, California, the host of the naturalization ceremony welcomes the people who have come to receive their American citizenship: ‘America becomes a better place because of you. Everybody, thank you for becoming citizens.’ This is greeted by clapping and whoops from the audience. In less elaborate surroundings of the

⁵ The countries were: the US, Canada, Australia, the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands See Byrne, B. (2014). *Making Citizens: Public rituals and personal journeys to citizenship*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan. for more details

Brooklyn courthouse, which lacks the razzmatazz of the Californian ceremony, the presiding Judge declares: 'When I look at this gathering, I see the beautiful smiles of America'. The idea of a country built on a history of immigration is a repeated theme which also ran through the ceremonies observed in the United States, Canada and Australia, three former settler colonies of the British Empire (Byrne 2014). However, this does not mean that the position of the immigrant is always a valued one, free of hostility and suspicion. In the context of the United States, there are ongoing political debates about what type of immigrants should be allowed to enter the country, how immigrants' cultural differences – and potentially divided loyalties – may or may not pose a threat to the country, and how to address undocumented migration. This debate has been heightened in the 2016 presidential campaign of Donald Trump. In addition, emphasis on immigrant contribution silences the histories of those who inhabited the land before the 'settlers' and those who were brought to the US as slaves (Glenn 2002; Kerber 2005).

The US has a long history of conducting ceremonies to celebrate the creation of new citizens and as a public arena for the taking of an oath or pledge of loyalty. The taking of an oath (most usually in court) was required in the first US naturalization law of 1790, but a standard text was only developed in 1929 (Bloemraad 2006: 21). The ceremonies are also internationally familiar: representations of naturalization ceremonies have featured in popular television series, and films which are marketed globally, of which *The West Wing* is just one.⁶ Thus ceremonies in the US have provided influential models for the more recent creation of ceremonies in Europe (Byrne 2014). In a similar way, several European countries have also introduced regimes of testing for new citizens (Byrne 2016).

Nations of Immigrants?

The national narrative presented by the officials in the citizenship ceremonies in the United States all rely at least partially on the notion of a nation of immigrants (Honig 2001). In many cases, the new citizens are presented in the ceremonies as the archetypal citizen in the immigrant nation. As the host of the Manhattan ceremony puts it: 'Perhaps your greatest responsibility is to remind native-born citizens what being an American is about'. In a video which is shown at the beginning of the ceremonies in America, the US immigration services director starts a presentation on Ellis Island stating:

The United States is a nation of immigrants. We have always been a nation of immigrants; we're the only country in the world that opens its arms as wide as we do to

⁶ Relatively recent representations of citizenship ceremonies include episodes of *Ugly Betty*, *The Real Housewives of Orange County*, *Hell's Kitchen*, *NCIS*. Popular representations of citizenship testing are also common – but both are outnumbered by fiction which centers around 'citizenship marriages', where people have marriages of convenience to allow them to stay in their country of choice (these include *Green Card*, *Muriel's Wedding*, *The Proposal* and *The Wedding Banquet*).

immigrants. I think the new blood, the new culture, the new experiences which come to this nation are what make us different and are what make America the country it is today (emphasis added).

Aside from the somewhat problematic biologicistic reference to ‘new blood’, this narrative of the ‘arms open wide’ to immigrants belies a much more complicated history. The presence of Native Americans who were in America before the colonialists and immigrants is overlooked (Glenn, 2002). Also silenced is the history of the forced immigration of slaves. In the pre-recorded speech made by President Obama, which is shown at the ceremony, a similar silencing is found. However, on other occasions (in speeches where he is present at the ceremonies), Obama does sometimes (although not every time⁷) mention these two groups. For instance, at a ceremony on the 4th of July 2012, he said: ‘we are a nation of immigrants. Unless you are one of the first Americans, a Native American, we are all descended from folks who came from somewhere else – whether they arrived on the Mayflower or a slave ship, whether they came through Ellis Island or crossed the Rio Grande.’ (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/07/04/remarks-president-naturalization-ceremony> accessed 2.4.14). Nonetheless, the rendition of slaves as ‘fellow immigrants’ remains a very odd formulation which cannot do justice to what Obama, in a famous pre-election speech, called ‘the original sin of slavery’ (Byrne 2011).

Finally, the expansive and welcoming suggestion of ‘arms open wide’ is contradicted by a long history of racialised immigration policies which have sought to restrict immigration from particular ethnic and racialised groups. For example, the Exclusions Act of 1882 prohibited the naturalization of Chinese immigrants and controlled the entry of Chinese migrants to such an extent that Chinese immigrants sometimes spent years living on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay (the equivalent to Ellis Island in Upper New York Bay) (Jaggers, Gabbard et al. 2014). In 1917, the ‘Asiatic-Barred Zone’ was established, which prohibited migration from China, India, the Middle East and the Philippines. In addition, there have been quotas in immigration since 1921, (Jaggers, Gabbard et al. 2014: 5). It was only in the 1940s that racial restrictions on naturalization were ended and finally in 1952 that an act was passed which removed race or national origin as a criterion for American citizenship (Bloemraad 2006: 22). The United States was also very late in signing up to United Nations provisions on refugees (which originated in 1951, but the USA did not conform to it until The Refugee Act of 1980) (Jaggers, Gabbard et al. 2014: 8–9).

The idea of ‘arms open wide’ is also undermined by the continued stringent effort of the state to control migration (particularly undocumented migration – often referred to as ‘illegal migrants’) and ongoing debates about the ‘threat’ of immigration to security and the economy of the United States. Immigration and

7 It was not possible to discern a pattern in the inclusion or not of these references.

outsiders are continually represented as a threat to the security of the nation. The debates are often conducted in racialised terms where particular national or ethnic groups are deemed to offer a specific threat. Popular cultural movements, such as the minute men patrolling the southern borders of the United States, also belie this image of unqualified hospitality (Weber 2008; Isin 2012).

Whilst the narrative of a nation of immigrants present in the ceremonies may provide a rather partial view of American history and nation-building, it nonetheless constitutes an important myth which is commonly asserted in national life in the US. In some ways, reference to this foundational myth serves to privilege the position of naturalized citizens. In a seeming reversal of some of the hostility to immigration, there is a suggestion that naturalized citizens are somehow *more* ideal citizens than those born in the US (Honig 2001). Yet in the broader context, this idealization of the new citizen can go alongside a hostility to immigrants through the creation of boundaries of legality/illegality. It is the technologies of border and immigration control that in part create certain migrants as illegal (De Genova 2002). Furthermore, the discourse of the special role of naturalized citizens still marks the new citizens out as different from other citizens because they are immigrants rather than citizens by birth.

The idea of new citizens as special worked with a narrative suggested in the ceremonies which positioned migrants as having a closer relationship to the 'American Dream'. The idea of the American Dream is referred to at several points in the ceremonies. In the videos shown, the director of the USCIS explains how the 100 million Americans who can trace their ancestry back to Ellis Island are connected by 'the dream', concluding 'In America, anything is possible'. The welcome video recorded by President Obama also claims: 'Always remember that in America, no dream is impossible... You can help write the next great chapter in our great American story'.

Similarly, in their speeches, the judges in Manhattan and Brooklyn use their own or their families' histories of immigration to illustrate The Dream. The judge in Manhattan explained her own history of migrating with her family from Lithuania to Israel and then on to the US explained how:

I became more comfortable, I learnt English from the TV. The school was good and I got into an Ivy League college. Seventeen years in a justice department. You could say I realised the American Dream.

Whilst the Brooklyn judge produced her own family's immigration story as a final flourish to her speech, before striding out from the court with her legal gown ballooning out behind her:

All my grandparents migrated to this country. I lived with my grandmother who migrated from Russia. She came steerage in a boat and landed at Ellis Island as a 14 year old. She worked in a sweatshop making dresses. Would she have imagined her granddaughter would be a federal judge? Have big dreams for you and your children and I wish you all the best.

These personal accounts show the power of the notion of the American Dream and how it is referred to in ways which suggest that it is open to all through immigration, or even somehow *more* possible for those who emigrate, or their near ancestors who have the fresh energy and commitment to make the Dream a reality. In the rendition in the ceremonies, this retelling of the story of the 'American Dream' relies on the idea of the social mobility of families and the possibility of fulfilling of the Dream over generations. The suggestion is that the journey towards the Dream may be completed by the new citizens' children, or their children's children.

Part of the problem of the narrative of a nation built by immigrants as produced in the ceremonies is that it sits awkwardly with the knowledge that there were already indigenous people whose rights to land and nationhood were ignored and who have historically been excluded from citizenship. There is also the question of how to fit in the large community of people whose ancestors were not immigrants following a dream, or compelled to leave their homes to escape oppression for which the US provided a refuge. How can narratives of the American Dream accommodate the stories of those forcibly brought to America as slaves? There is a history of the denial of rights of citizenship, including the long-lasting deprivation of many rights that African Americans suffered under the 'Jim Crow' laws. The historic segregation of public spaces, access to public services such as education and health and the de facto disenfranchisement of black voters have continuing economic, social and cultural effects (Alexander 2010). Yet these histories are not told in the ceremonies which focus only on new citizens and the experience of migration.

Given the ways in which immigration and citizenship rights in the United States are bound up with a history of exclusions and discrimination, it is notable that, whilst there were references made to civil and political rights in some of the US ceremonies and a considerable encouragement given to registering for voting, no mention was made of this history which might disrupt the 'nation of immigrants' narrative.

Stand up and Cheer for Your Country

The naturalization ceremonies observed in the US emphasized cultural and national difference of the new citizens whilst at the same time suggesting that the ceremonies have a function of a ritual which involves moving from one status (the prior nationality) to another (American). The ceremonies in both California and Manhattan followed a similar format which involved both identifying the citizands' nationalities and then appearing to distance the participants from them. As the master of ceremonies, in Manhattan introduces it:

There are 140 people here today. You have many things in common, but you are also a very diverse group from 37 different countries. Today you will *all stand as one* and become citizens (emphasis added).

What might be seen as the wonder of diversity is presented at the Oakland ceremony which had a high energy, show-business entertainment feeling to it. The MC litters his announcements with jokes and interaction with the audience. To gasps and cheers he tells the audience that there are 1399 people here representing 95⁸ countries, 'but in just a few minutes, just one'. He had explained that, although it was a legal ceremony, he wanted everyone to feel able to clap and cheer as much as they want. In the manner of a 'warm-up' host before a television broadcast, he gets everyone to practice being loud and cheering. He says 'maybe we need something to cheer for. A lot of people from a small country are here'. He goes on to ask everyone to clap for 'Our friends from El Salvador' which is responded to by clapping. 'How about Mexico?': a question which is followed with very loud cheers, whistling and clapping. The celebration of diversity is also underlined a jokey routine he establishes where he amazes the audience by each new language he can speak (or at least say 'welcome' in). After speaking in Spanish; Mandarin; French ('One of America's first allies is here'); Russian (for 'our newest friends'); Hindi; Filipino, he jokes:

OK, I suppose I should stop now (more cheering and clapping). Besides, I see some faces up front looking like, 'Oh no, he's not going to do this for 88 more countries is he?' (followed by more laughter).

This polished performance demonstrates an embrace of difference, but care is taken to return to unity:

Oh shoot. I want to do one more. Can I?
Yes!
Let's hear it for the San Francisco Giants!

As this followed an important victory for the local baseball team, the theatre erupts in cheering with the loudest cheer of the day. Here the local is referenced as a common bond which trumps differences of national origin.

All the observed ceremonies in the United States had a ritual of calling out the countries people had come from, cheering them, before having the participants 'standing as one'. In the Brooklyn ceremony, the ritual of renouncing difference and former solidarities is made particularly starkly as, after the oaths have been made, the judge explains that she will call out each country and asks people to stand and clap the countries. She then goes through each of the 62 countries of origin saying 'Will the new citizen formerly from Please stand up'. This multiple repetition of the phrase of 'formerly from' served to underline the idea that a nationality has been left behind. As all of the citizands are finally standing up she concludes with 'Isn't that the most beautiful thing?'

8 This figure is slightly inflated as it counts countries according to how they appear on the original application form. Thus Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic are both counted separately.

However, in these ceremonies, there was a tension between the symbolism of what the citizands were doing – marking a departure from a particular identity for the sake of a unifying identity of American – and the ways in which it was carried out. The performance of this ritual, in terms of the ways in which citizands participated in it as well as other remarks made by the judges or official hosts, served to work against the idea of the withdrawal of different cultural identities and produce a sense of American identity as a hyphenated identity which could include the new citizens' 'former' identities. In this model, loyalty, affection and the retention of a sense of cultural difference are preserved. This tension between renouncing 'former' countries of origin and retaining loyalty can be seen in the enthusiastic cheering for each country – and particularly those where many of the citizands came from, such as Mexico, El Salvador and the Philippines. There was also a sense that all countries were to be celebrated. Given the political climate and the enduring sense of Iran as part of the 'Axis of Evil', it was perhaps rare in the United States of 2012 to hear an enthusiastic cheer in response to the naming of Iran. The continued loyalty or affiliation to countries was also indicated by some citizands arriving wearing sweatshirts with the name of their homelands on them. In the Brooklyn ceremony, after the judge has gone through all the countries that people were 'formerly of', she appears to contradict the suggestion that the ceremony has involved relinquishing an identity or a national loyalty when she exhorts them:

Be proud of your own country – you don't have to give up anything of it. Don't give up the things in your heart; don't give up your language. Teach your children your language; don't give up your customs. Carry them with you and keep your connections to the country – explain and share your customs with others – what the specific food is. This world is in a bad place and you can't expect leaders to get it better. Explain to others what's special about your home country and build bridges.

The new citizens are left to negotiate the apparent contrast between pride for their 'home countries' and the declaration of their 'former' status. The following section will examine the oath of allegiance taken at the ceremonies which also continues this tension between loyalty to old and new national identities.

Taking the Oath

A key part of the naturalization ceremony is the oath or pledge of allegiance. As the judge in Manhattan pointed out, she needed to see each citizand saying it. The oath of allegiance in the US is a good example of an invented tradition which has the appearance of a long-standing, even ancient tradition (particularly suggested by the use of archaic language) but is in fact of relatively modern invention and which also continues to be subject to changes and modifications. The current oath of allegiance that citizands in the US have to take is as follows:

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince or state or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen, that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms⁹ on behalf of the United States when required to by law, and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, so help me God.

The oath to renounce allegiance to former countries again stands in strong contrast to the encouragement in the ceremonies to maintain cultural ties and affiliations to countries of origin (and indeed in contrast to the cheers of support for ‘former’ countries) as discussed in the previous section. Another particularly striking aspect of this oath is the complicated structure and old-fashioned language. This would appear to suggest that the oath has a similarly old heritage. However, whilst an oath of allegiance has always been a requirement in naturalization, the form it took was not made uniform at a national level until 1906. This reform of the oath also set out the requirement for a public ceremony, rather than court appearance (Aptekar 2012). The wording of the oath has undergone repeated modifications.

The last major alteration (the commitment to bear arms) introduced in 1952. The actual text of the oath is not enshrined in law in the United States, and the USCIS recently did consider changing the oath to simplify the language. However, this prompted sufficient opposition, from both politicians and the public, to block any changes.¹⁰ The oath begins with the requirement to ‘absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance or fidelity to any foreign prince, state or sovereignty’ which would suggest hostility to dual citizenship. However, despite what the oath suggests, in practice, and in law, dual citizenship is not illegal in the United States and the government recognizes that naturalized US citizens may remain citizens in their country of birth.¹¹

The code covering the American oath of allegiance allows for the religious elements (‘so help me God’ and the word ‘oath’) to be omitted (and the oath replaced with ‘solemnly affirm’). However, in none of the ceremonies observed was this option exercised and it is not clear how easy it would be for citizens to choose to avoid religious declaration. The same applies for the commitment to ‘bear arms’ which may be omitted if it can be shown that participation in the military is contrary to a person’s beliefs. In the ceremonies, the oath of allegiance is followed by the pledge of allegiance to the flag, where the audience can also join in, saying:

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

9 This can be omitted for those who have religious beliefs which oppose the taking of a combatant role <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=facdb8db8d7e37210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD&vgnextchannel=dd7ffe9dd4aa3210VgnVCM100000b92ca60aRCRD> (accessed 29/9/13).

10 <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/208022/oath-ice/john-j-miller> (accessed 29/9/13).

11 See http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1753.html (accessed 29/9/13).

This ties citizenship clearly into association with the nation in what Arendt (Arendt 1958) described as the ‘conquest’ of the state by the nation, whereby the potentially more neutral bureaucratic functions of the state are saturated by the culturally specific practices of national identity, the most obvious of which in this instance is the religious component. The question of faith, in terms of the nature of the commitment to, or good faith of, the oath will be considered in the next section.

Does Saying It Make You a Citizen?

The taking of the oath is the moment when the citizands become citizens. The oaths are performative in the sense first outlined by J.L. Austin, that they involve not merely saying something, but actually *doing* something. The words call into being an act (Austin 1997: 235). The commonly cited examples of this are ‘I pronounce you man and wife’ or ‘I sentence you to imprisonment’. As the USCIS website puts it: ‘Taking the oath will complete the process of becoming a US citizen.’¹²

As Austin pointed out, however, performative utterances can be unsuccessful or, in his terms ‘unhappy’. (Austin 1997: 237). They may be infelicitous if the necessary circumstances to give them effect do not occur. But they also depend on the right intentions of the speaker. In the case of the oaths or pledges of allegiance and commitment, it is clear that there may be what Austin called ‘insincerities’. That those taking the oath may not feel sincere. This possibility gives rise to a certain tension behind oath-taking, in terms of how it is to be understood by those hearing the oath. Whilst there are no explicit means in the ceremonies by which the sincerity of the citizands is tested, there are nonetheless friendly suggestions that it might be a concern. For example, the judge in Brooklyn stopped the citizands as they began pledging the oath and starts again, urging them to ‘say it louder!’

It is clear that the citizands already know the correct deportment to use when swearing the oath of allegiance (and singing the national anthem) as they make the familiar gesture of the right hand placed over the position of their heart. Alongside the more explicit expression of concern that the oath should be said with conviction, or sincerity, the ceremonies also produce other performances of enthusiasm and patriotism towards the United States and becoming a citizen. For instance, the judge in Brooklyn begins with the question ‘is everyone excited?’ At each ceremony, the citizands are given small stars-and-stripes flags which at various times they are encouraged to wave by the ceremony officials who were themselves waving along energetically, in a manner akin to teachers at a school assembly. In both the Manhattan and the Oakland ceremony, a video shows a message from President Obama congratulating them on becoming American citizens. The video ends with the Lee Greenwood singing ‘God Bless America’, a song written by Irving

12 <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.eb1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=2335743ebbe8a310VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD&vgnextchannel=2335743ebbe8a310VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD> (accessed 29/9/13).

Berlin in 1918 and which is commonly played at national and sporting events.¹³ The video accompanying the song shows iconic pictures of American landscapes and buildings and monuments, as well as the subtitles to the song. The citizands are encouraged to sing along to the song and wave their mini flags. As the host in Manhattan says: 'This is your day, be proud and sing it loud. You're US citizens and we're seeking the next American idol' (audience laughs). In a further injunction to take the ceremony in the right spirit, the citizands are urged: 'however you choose to celebrate this day, please celebrate it.' In conversation and during the interviews, the officials also emphasize their perception that the ceremonies and the swearing of the oath are meaningful to the citizands by pointing out how frequently citizands cry during the ceremony. In these cases, the outward expression of emotion is taken as reassurance that the inward intention is sincere.

This emotional display is not only performed by the citizands (and their guests), but also by officials who take part in the ceremonies and often explain how much they enjoy organizing and witnessing the ceremonies. The judge in Brooklyn said to the audience:

This is the best part of my job and I say it from my heart. [...] I'm the lucky person who gets to stand here and say "welcome", we are so glad you decided to become American.

This is another reminder of the potential not to be welcomed to the US. As one of the officials at the Manhattan ceremony pointed out, much of the judge's work would involve deportations. Thus, in contrast to a deportation hearing which potentially rips people away from the lives they are living and hope to live, at the ceremonies, people are pleased to see her. Acts of expulsion and deportation of course constitute an important distinction between the citizen and non-citizen, since only the citizen has truly permanent rights of settlement (although in some cases these rights are less secure for immigrants than citizens by birth) (Anderson, Gibney et al. 2011).¹⁴

Once the ceremony is completed, there is an acknowledgement that this transformation may take some adjusting to. For example, the host in Oakland gives advice 'to those who may be worried about leaving the building and walking around the street without a Green Card'. He assures them that they should not worry because:

When you leave here today for the first time you will be legally entitled to say: 'excuse me officer, I'm a citizen of the United States' (claps from the audience). You don't have to carry proof of US citizenship.

13 See Kaskowitz, S. (2013). *God Bless America. The Surprising History of an Iconic Song*. New York, Oxford University Press. for an account of the political history of the song 'God Bless America'.

14 On deportations and deportability, see De Genova, N. (2007). "The Production of Culprits: From Deportability to Detainability in the Aftermath of "Homeland Security"." *Citizenship Studies* 11(5): 421—448.

However, it is likely that some new citizens, particularly those from racialised groups, may be left with the anxiety that they will not be 'read' by government officials and others as US citizens. They may still need to prove their identity to police and other officials, and may still face prejudice even as American citizens (for example in the ironic labeling of the crime of 'driving while black').

Most citizens of a country have never had to go through a citizenship ceremony. This difference can leave residual doubts as to when citizens truly become citizens, in other words, as to how truly performative the ceremonies are. Or, alternatively, what kind of citizen they produce. In the Manhattan ceremony, there was a suggestion of these kinds of doubts. The judge made a fairly long speech which was, as she said, about love, although she hastily explained: 'not romantic love' (audience laughs) 'I might get into trouble for that and it's too early in the morning. But love of your country'. She goes on to acknowledge that it is a 'complicated issue', arguing that:

The country you came from you may love more than before. It is the place you go for vacation and to relax. The US is the place where your daily struggles occur and you may not necessarily be feeling much love. So how do you come to love the US?

In this account, we get the merest hint of hostility and unequal conditions that immigrants might face, with the reference to 'daily struggles'. The judge went on to explore her own history of emigration to the US as a child from Israel and how she did not find it an easy experience: 'I wasn't feeling love; I was annoyed at my parents.' She describes how, in her twenties she became fascinated in American history and the civil war and the civil rights movement. She ends her speech with:

I learned to love the US by getting to know it on a different level. I hope that if you don't feel it then you begin to feel the love – good luck to all of you and God bless America.

This speech has a double effect. On the one hand it recognizes the ties and affection that the new citizens may still have for their home countries. However, on the other it potentially suggests that they are not yet fully citizens until they can 'feel love' for the country. Thus there is a feeling that the citizenship ceremony is only the start of their transformation, rather than a celebration of the end of a process. This leaves a remaining tension about when the new citizens can feel secure in their belonging and when they will be considered by others as properly American.

Conclusion

This article has asked: What can ceremonies and their performance tell us about how the nation is being narrated and how new citizens are regarded at this moment of naturalization? The continuing importance given to oath taking and membership of the nation, alongside continuing criticism of 'illegal immigrants' and threats of

migration suggests that the post-nation and post-citizenship moment was perhaps celebrated prematurely. In the ceremonies themselves, as important as what is said, is also what is not said. This is particularly significant when thinking of how the nation and its history are told in regard to citizenship. In these ceremonies in the US, colonial settler histories, involving genocides of indigenous people and a renunciation of their rights to land and civil and political rights do not get told. Whilst the US does have a history of openness to immigration but at the same time, this has always been accompanied with highly racialised caveats to that openness and welcome. These histories are silenced in the production of a narrative of an immigrant nation in the ceremonies. This stands in contrast to the ceremonies in both Canada and Australia where at least official some mention was made of those who had inhabited the land before the settlers (Byrne 2014). The narrative of nations built on the contribution of immigrants is potentially a powerful one for giving new citizens in a nation a sense of their place in the new country. It tends to enhance a sense that the immigrants have shown resilience and can bring benefits to a country. However, this narrative can inhibit the official recognition of the more conflictual history in which exclusions based on race and national origin have also figured and where, in the contemporary period, many migrants have experienced hostility and discrimination. Accounts of openness also fail to account for the ways in which states are involved in identifying some migrants as illegal and seeking their deportation. Arms are only ever held open wide for certain categories of migrants. It may well be the case that, for some of the new citizens, their racialized positions may mean that they continue to be met with suspicion and hostility by arms of the state, or other American citizens and their membership of the nation will need to be restated and proved in many arenas of everyday life. The ceremonies in the United States fail to reflect this more complicated reality.

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